

What's next in nation's health care debate?

Senate, conference committee must OK bill before it goes to president

Around 10:15 p.m. last Saturday, the House passed H.R. 3962 – better known as Speaker Pelosi's health care overhaul bill – by a vote of 220 to 215 (218 votes were needed to pass). In a strong showing of bipartisanship, 39 Democrats voted against the bill (only one Republican voted for it).

I voted against this terrible piece of legislation because it is a government takeover of health care that will raise taxes, cut health care services, and perhaps most alarming, set our nation on a dangerous path in which the government encroaches on our lives even more.

The U.S. Constitution declares "We the people," not "we the government," and in my opinion, the government and the United States would be better served by us remembering that. This legislation chips away at the independence our Founding Fathers fought for and replaces it with citizens being dependent on their government for care.

In addition to the government takeover, the House bill is concerning because it's being orchestrated by the same people who led Cash for Clunkers and the stimulus package, as well as because we don't know when the spending will end with this bill or how high the final costs will go beyond the estimates.

However, this is not the end-all, be-all of health care legislation. There are a lot of steps that need to happen before this government takeover of health care could be signed into law.

To start, the Senate needs to debate and vote on the Senate's own version of the bill, which is different than the



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WS Daily News, 11/21
House version.

While President Obama would like the legislation on his desk before Christmas, many doubt this will happen as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid faces a difficult challenge in getting the bill passed.

Should the Senate pass their health care bill, then the next step is going to conference. This is when a few senators and representatives get together to hash out the differences in the two versions of the bill and settle on one final form.

Once the bill is out of conference in its final form, the bill needs to be voted on again (and pass) in both the House and the Senate. Only after the legislation is passed by both chambers is it presented to the president to be signed into law.

Let's hope Senators Kohl and Feingold listen to Wisconsinites and put a stop to this by voting against the Senate version, as it's the wrong prescription for America.

(U.S. Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., R-Menomonee Falls, represents Wisconsin's 5th Congressional District.)